




Drum roll, please

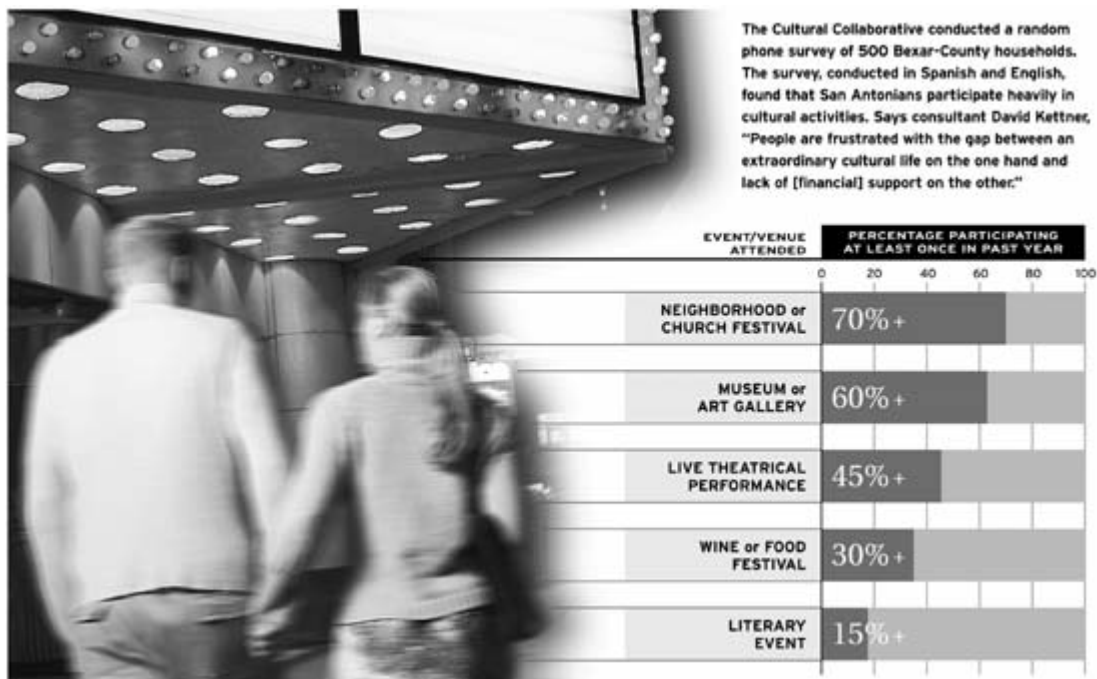
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After 13 months of meetings and surveys, the Cultural Collaborative presents a plan for art and business

Many American cities have a downtown cultural district - our neighbors Houston and Fort Worth come to mind - and for the most part some master planning went into those collections of museums, botanical gardens, concert halls, and theaters. Around them spring up supporting businesses such as boutique hotels, bars that don't serve test-tube shots, restaurants with Michelin stars, and cozy coffee and dessert shops. Here in San Antonio we wonder, How deep are the swanky Valencia Hotel's pockets, will the Symphony make it, and when will the Museo Americano be finished?



A comfy room and fine dining can be attractions by themselves, but most travelers are looking for something to do between meals and naps. For La Quinta and Pat O'Brien's, San Antonio can usually provide a steady flow of families splitting their time between the Alamo, Sea World, and Fiesta Texas, and conventioners eager to cut loose after a day of seminars. But these tourists are often perceived by the local arts communities as a type of competition. Since City arts funding comes entirely from the Hotel Occupancy Tax, which also supports the Convention and Visitors Bureau, tension has arisen over several inter-related issues: Should organizations that receive City funds have to demonstrate that they contribute to tourism income? Historically, Fiesta Texas families have not bought Symphony tickets or visited CineFestival at the Guadalupe Arts Center, but cultural tourists - travelers who build their schedule around art fairs, museums, and performances - spend more money when they do come to town. What activities and organizations should the CVB promote? Centro Cultural Aztlan's Low and Slow Classic Car Show is puro San Antonio whereas Shamu and the multi-talented seals were grafted on. Should City funding be increased when San Antonio's private charitable funding of the arts is among the lowest in the nation for comparable cities? The SBC Foundation, Toyota, and the Coates Foundation, to name a few, have re-invested in the larger arts community, but plenty of trust funds sit untapped at local banks.

These questions, thorny enough on their own, can only be addressed as part of the larger problem of San Antonio's economic and cultural development. The Cultural Collaborative, "a plan for San Antonio's creative economy," separates a thickly woven fabric - education, business investment, property taxes, etc. - into five strands in its draft final report, which is scheduled to be presented to City Council for approval in mid February: Access, Economic Development, Community Awareness, Authenticity and Creativity, and Resources.

